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MINIATURES

MINIATURES

BY

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"WHERE MY BOOK GOES."

All the words that I utter,
And all the words that I write,
Must spread out their Wings untiring,
And never rest in their flight,
Till they come where your sad, sad heart is,
And sing to you in the night,
Beyond where the waters are moving,
Storm-darkened or starry bright.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS.

**“THE THINGS THAT ARE
SEEN”**

“THE THINGS THAT ARE SEEN ”

“The things that are seen are temporal—but the things
that are not seen are eternal.”

THEY were both on the Broad and easy Path,
he and she !

They had never met before !

And suddenly, without any foreknowledge
of what was to befall them, they came to a
“stand, in the easy, Broad Path.”

Her name was Reckless, his Don't Care,
so that when they met (without even keen
observation) the result, according to the
World's Verdict, would be Disaster.

The World, however, does not usually take
account of the One who rules all, and He had
decreed that Reckless should *not* go “head-
long,” and that Don't Care *should* care.

Whether rightly or wrongly, they were now daily together.

The Broad Path was easy and peaceful, and the Sun shone brightly on their easy and light footsteps. Everything brought joy, and they forgot that, although gay, joyous summer was at its height, soon it must wane, and winter set in with its cold blasts and paths of Snow and Ice, where now only grasses grew and rivers flowed.

Down their path they gaily passed.

The Devil stood, and watched, and nodded ; he approved !

How fair he was making life for them ! Could his ingenious brain charm this youthful couple with any other device ?—he pondered, but he had, somehow, his doubts.

Don't Care cared when Reckless dashed her foot against a stone.

He didn't like this ; it showed a weakness in Don't Care ; and Reckless, after she had hopped along with the aid of Don't Care's arm, had actually become careful.

No, he was beginning to disapprove of those who, he had been quite certain, were his own.

Days turned into weeks, and the Summer had ended.

With a gesture of sorrow Reckless surveyed the Path, which was beginning to darken—surveyed it with a look not usually worn on her little reckless face.

"Don't Care," she said, "it is beginning to get dark ; our Summer is ended."

Don't Care showed concern, and gazed about him.

"If," he said, "it gets much darker, we shall not be able to see our way at all."

They were both serious.

Then Don't Care pointed. "Look," he said, "our Broad Path ends at the turning of the road. See, one can only choose between going together down the roaring Torrent below, or going singly up the tiny paths on the Mountain's side."

Reckless looked to where he pointed, and shrank back.

She shook her head slowly.

"Down the Torrent is the *easiest* way, but it means death at the end," she sighed. And yet her reckless voice rang out clear and



determined. "Take me, and I will go, my friend, Don't Care."

Don't Care never moved or spoke.

"Reckless, I will *not* take you"; those were the words he uttered when at last, with bated breath, he spoke.

She gave a low laugh, but it was not happy.

She looked at him, and pointed for him to sit down on the moss-covered stone on the roadside.

He sat down on the low boulder, and she took a higher one, from which she looked down on him.

"Yes, you are quite right, Don't Care, but I wonder why we met to part so soon?" and she shrugged her shoulders.

He shook his head.

Turning her head, she glanced up the Mountain.

"How terribly steep, Don't Care; isn't it? Shall we be able to get up it?"

Don't Care groaned, and his head sank on his breast.

He stood up suddenly, and held out his hand to help her down from the boulder.

"Come, little Reckless, we must start or the Torrent will be our ending."

She had never heard Don't Care speak in such a way. He was pale and grave.

She stood looking down at him, not taking his offered hand to help her.

"Don't Care, I have never heard you speak like this before; why do you?"

"Because, Reckless, you have made me."

"I? How?"

"Because I am no longer Don't Care."

"Who are you then?"

"Anything but that. It seems to me my name is nearer Despair than anything else."

Then Reckless took the locket which bore her name from its dainty chain around her neck, and flung it into the roaring Torrent below.

Despair, for that was now his name, smiled—a weary, sorry smile.

"Reckless is no more," he said,—“is no more. What is the name she is to bear?"

"I know not. What will help you, Despair?"

"Me?" he shook his head. "Hope would help me, but nothing else."

"Hope, then, is my new name."

Her face brightened; they had come to the foot of the Mountain, one path lay to the right, the other more or less right up.

"Which path," he asked, "will you choose?"

She was silent, and he saw Hope's colour fade to a pale, pale ashen hue.

"The straight one?"

Poor Despair and Hope sighed.

"How *are* we to mount?"

And Despair thought of Hope's loneliness, and Hope thought of Despair's narrow path.

Hope caught Despair, for the first time, by the arm.

"You know I trust you, but indeed, truly, truly promise me, promise me you'll keep to your path."

Her words rang out clearly in the cold biting air.

He looked at her. Then Despair knelt down and took the two hands of Hope between his own, and said—

"God is my Witness—God will be my

Helper. “I chose the Path because——” but he never finished.

His words were carried away by a blast of wind which nearly overwhelmed them both.

Did they hear a Lion’s Roar? A Lion’s Roar as though robbed of his Prey! They shivered at the growing darkness, and as it grew darker and darker the lights on the Mountain began to show themselves clearer still and stronger.

“Despair,” cried Hope, her slight form bending before the blinding wind, pointing upwards to the lights, “look; you see those lights; I feel sure our Paths must share those lights occasionally. We shall meet, if only to say those words of cheer that even that narrow, honest little Path requires at times”; and she tried vainly to smile. “How black it is getting, Despair; I can scarcely see. But I forgot, Hope must look up, and looking, I see bright lights. Are you ready?” and her voice dropped to a whisper.

“I am ready,” replied Despair; “and you?” his voice was as low as hers. “Kiss me, Hope.”

She shook her head, and pointed up again, her eyes dim with tears.

“Not till we reach the Top of the Mountain,” she answered, and a half sob escaped her.

So Hope and Despair parted in raging, blinding wind and darkness, each on their own narrow Path—but the man turned and looked after the woman.

She had chosen the quickest and the steepest way. Poor Despair! his man's nature was racked with longings to shield her. He saw her totter against the howling, raging wind. She staggered on, and, as he gazed with anguish-stricken eyes, he heard a Lion's Roar that sounded as though the mighty beast had been disappointed of his Prey; and as he turned and carefully picked his perilous way along the edge of the Rock, he prayed the Lion might not be seen by Hope.

Years passed, and still Despair toiled on.

At certain turns of the Mountain ridge he came upon the old Broad Path, and once or twice he had stayed to talk to friends who used all persuasion to get him

to return. But he always shook his head and told them it had no charms now for him. The "difficult" had become a second nature; and, besides, he would add, "There is nothing at the end of all your joys." And they would laugh at him, and tauntingly inquire what was at the end of *his* solitary Path?

Then he would look upon them and smile, as though he held a secret too precious for them to understand, and utter the one word "Hope."

They left him, these Broad Path friends, in sympathetic pity at his losing his Reason, as they, in their ignorance, imagined.

But although Despair came upon the Broad Path at certain Seasons, yet never had he touched or crossed Hope's steep ascent.

One day he had lain himself down under a huge burly oak. The Sun was setting, and through the branches of smaller trees and undergrowth he saw its wondrous red and golden tints.

Pert, his Dog, who had never left him, lay by his side.

Suddenly he sat up, his ears alert; and Despair, knowing how he would chase Rabbits or any ground game, put his hand on his collar.

“Still, Pert, you old Poacher!—be quiet.”

But Pert refused to obey.

Despair followed the dog's eyes, and instantly he was on his feet gazing down the Path which lay in Shadow. There he could see the outline of a figure he knew.

The woman sat with a stringed instrument in her hands, and from the distance it looked as though it had but one string. He dashed forward. Yes, there she sat looking far out at the Sunset. A bright gleam fell across her, and as he approached he saw her little frock was torn and ragged, her bare feet were scarred, and the hands, how thin they looked! But her face, her face!

He had trodden softly on the moss, and held his Dog tightly in his arms so as to prevent him dashing up to her and so letting her know he was there.

“Hope!” So deep had been her reverie that she had not heard him, and as her name fell

upon her ear she slowly turned and fixed her eyes upon his face.

He saw in them a strength which was not there when they had parted.

How like a little weather-beaten Warrior she looked, and yet it was the old Reckless still, but glorified into Hope.

There was no surprise in her voice, for had she not expected at any moment during these years of toil to meet Despair? And now that he had come she knew it would be as the fleeting of a shadow, yet she rejoiced. And so, as her tired voice cried “Despair!” it embodied indeed great gladness.

The simple utterance of his name seemed to send the blood flowing with double rapidity through his veins, but his voice was as calm as hers.

“Yes—at last! All these years and our paths not to cross; and yet several times I have been on the Broad Path. Have you, Hope?”

“Yes, often; and I was laughed at, and asked why I would not join them again. And I told them their Path had no prize at the end,

and mine had. They looked upon me as a Fool."

"Yes, I told them the same ; but I told them it was for Hope, and they could not understand *that*."

Then he stooped down, kneeling on one knee.

"Your poor feet are scarred," he said, gently touching them as though to soothe the wounds, which in places were still unhealed.

She nodded. "But, Despair, they got these scars where I least expected it, in places where the Path seemed to have no stones. You—you are not so torn as I am ; but your poor hands, they are torn in many places," and Hope's eyes looked as though to weep.

Despair laughed.

"Yes, the ledge in some places of my path is so narrow that I cannot but cling and clutch at the bushes and branches to keep me on it. Pert, even poor Pert sets up a dismal howl when he looks ahead."

"Poor Pert," and Hope stroked his soft head gently.

“Oh, Pert, we shan’t have to fight on *much* longer. We three, Pert, must cheer each other on—we will—and God *will* bless us. Despair, look how our path has met, exactly at the right point! I even was wearied to utter weariness, and my poor Lyre has but one string left. A man I met, who had this Lyre, when first I began to walk the Narrow Path, offered it me. He was dying, he said, and had no further use for it. Then it was beautiful to play on—but *now* ’tis but a one-stringed instrument; but even that gives me hope, for it makes me sing to it.”

Then a sudden Roar fell upon their ears.

Hope turned pale; and as she stood shading her eyes, looking out, Despair came close to her.

“It is nothing, Hope, nothing but the roaring of the Lion, who can do no real harm here.”

“Why not?” and Hope trembled.

“Because in the Narrow Path God chains him; in the Broad Path he is allowed to roam at will. I have learnt that in all these years of toil.”

“And I have learnt, too, that Despair is not now any more your name than when you changed it from Don't Care. It is now to be Trust.”

“Yes,” and he smiled. “Yes, Hope, it shall be Trust if you wish.”

They stood watching the dying Sunset in silence, and as the last ray died out Hope whispered—

“Beyond—beyond is the great unknown, where you and I are wending. I am more battered with the blasts and devastating rains of my Path than you, Trust ; but what matters ? Next time we meet I may have passed through fairer weather, and then it may be never to say farewell, for we must part now.”

“So soon ?”

She nodded. “Yes, dear Trust,—good-bye—good-bye.”

And so again they parted.

And the years rolled on. And the years rolled on, and how tired out, weary, and almost heartbroken was Trust.

One day Trust was conscious that on ahead was the sound of a woman's singing—she was

slowly chanting the Evening Hymn. The Birds sang, their notes blending with hers.

How fragrant the air was; the perfume of the flowers nearly overpowered him.

Nearer, nearer came the voice. Instinctively poor Trust (for, oh, how weary he was!) knew it was Hope's voice. He hurried on, and what met his eyes was the slight figure, sitting against a tree, of a woman blindfolded, bending over her Lyre with the one string, which every now and then gave the sweet "ping" from the one string.

He knew she could not see him, for her eyes were bandaged, so he drew closer and closer.

"Hope, I am come."

"I heard you," she said very gently.

She rose and put her little thin hands out.

"I knew you would come. I am blind, a Bramble hanging across the Narrow Path caught my eyes. I was running, and so it caught me without my being able to draw back."

He took her two hands in his hard rough ones, and she raised her face to his.

"Trust," and she drew her hands from him

and placed them round his neck, drawing down his head so that his forehead touched her lips, "Come," and turning she laid her Lyre against the tree.

He took her hand, and they walked a little way. She stopped and pointed.

"You see (God gives me this inward sight) that thick cluster of small and large trees?"

"Yes," replied Trust. His voice vibrated with its intensity; something, something he knew would suddenly happen, and suffering would go, and Hope's eyes would once more shine on him. He *knew it*. The air seemed to stifle him. He had only one object, one desire—to open the Door Golden which shimmered through the trees.

Hand in hand they walked up the slight incline, and over the Door was written—

"Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

The pallor of the two faces as they stood awaiting the opening of that door—the Door of Eternal Life!

And as it fell back, a great shout of joy arose from myriads of voices, and a voice of exquisite tone, blended with love, said—

"These are they that have passed through great Tribulation."

Hope looked at Trust, and lo! they were no longer in their travelled, worn attire, but they were clad in snowy whiteness, and before their minds came the meaning of the words—

"He that overcometh shall be arrayed in White Garments."

They were greeted with the Shouts of mighty voices joining in the chorus of Praise and Thanksgiving.

With a tender arm laid round little Hope's shoulders, Trust drew her to a bench of beautiful texture, which seemed to impart soothing strength to their limbs, no longer weary.

He took her two hands in his, which were no longer hard, for all the bruises had gone.

"For ever," said little Hope, looking at Trust's face, from which all care had gone.

"Yes, for ever," he repeated, looking with wonder at the glorious light in those eyes that had been blind.

"It was our lives we gave; but that was only temporal—these things are for Eternity."

“Everything ours now for ever and ever ! God’s Almighty Love has sent His only Son to show us the Way ; only our terrible Path was even nothing to His.” And so they talked, and at length, rejoicingly happy, they went to meet their Lord and Master.

HER IDEAL

HER IDEAL

CHAPTER I

THE Reverend John Pemberton was not a man at all to be attracted usually by women—a plain, homely, true little woman was *his* wife. But as he stood on the Folkestone platform he found himself looking with grave interest on a woman who was, by a strange coincidence, talking to a man-friend of his.

She attracted him ; and fascination pervaded all she said and did, for he could catch her conversation, and every now and again saw her eyes wander around as if to recognise a friend's face. Mr. Donaldson, Mr. Pemberton's friend, introduced them, saying—

“Mrs. David Bodley — Mr. Pemberton.

Now, Pemberton, you've just to take jolly good care of Mrs. Bodley—she's travelling to town."

Mr. Pemberton bowed, and Mrs. Bodley laughed.

"A most stupendous responsibility!"

And then, somehow, Pemberton found himself standing outside Mrs. Bodley's carriage, and Donaldson saying, "That woman's one of the angels of the earth"; and the next moment he was in the train with her.

Pemberton had been taking a fortnight's work to help a friend abroad. A man of about forty-five, a slight, little man. He had taken Honours at Oxford, and after ordination had been fortunate enough to drop into a unique country living. He was very happy in his home life with three children. A man intensely alive to the wants or needs of others.

After helping Mrs. David Bodley with her rug and bag, etc., he settled down to read. But, somehow, he could not fix his attention; the woman in the opposite corner attracted him. She was such a contradiction; such sad,

weary eyes and yet such smiling lips. "Was she more than thirty?" he asked himself. Tall, slight, fair, and with deep blue eyes. He began to wonder if that David Bodley whose name he saw on her box was a man he had particularly disliked at Oxford.

"Forgive me saying, I wonder," he said, "if the David Bodley I knew at Oxford is your husband. It is many years ago."

"What was he like?" asked she.

"Oh——" There he came to a dead stop.

"My husband is a most *un*ordinary sort of man—utterly spoils me with his goodness," and she smiled again.

"I don't think the David Bodley that I knew would do that"; he was horrified at himself blurting out his opinion.

"My ideal husband," she laughed gaily, "is a great deal taller than I am, with a beautiful, strong, gentle face. Is that like your David Bodley at Oxford?"

"Oh no," quickly asserted the clergyman; "his face was hard, hard, and he was generally disliked. You show me it couldn't be the man."

"Oh no, that couldn't be my husband," and she gave another laugh. "You see I lead an ideal existence with my husband; we never have a word of disagreement. In fact, nothing could be more perfect."

He looked at her closely; was she speaking ironically? But she faced him: her eyes looked with an amused look into his.

She was elegant to her finger-tips; and as this fascinating woman lent back in the railway carriage, taking off her gloves, the man watching her felt what a power for good or evil that face and figure could wield. Her gloves off, she began to get a book from her bag on the seat by her side. She laid it open on her lap and she gazed out of the window. Those dark-blue eyes *were* sad beyond description; or rather, weary, weary, weary to death. In repose this weariness suddenly struck one. In conversation it vanished, but in repose they seemed to relapse from the assumed part they played. *What* was this misery? And the clergyman longed to help her, why he knew not, for when she talked, so bright were her tones they defied all sympathy.

"What are you reading, Mrs. Bodley?"

"A book of extracts from our finest writers; and then I have as well Benson's *Angel of Pain*—I love his character of 'Tom' so."

"Do you read much?" he asked.

"Yes, a great deal. I work a great deal—or rather, have several things that interest me in life. My husband, you see, also has a great deal to do abroad. He is——" Then she broke off. "I wonder if anyone had a more perfect husband than I? He gives me everything; and as to our home being childless, it doesn't seem to affect him—some husbands would think a childless life a great hardship, but I never hear a word of complaint."

The clergyman was silent for a few moments; then he said, "You are a fortunate woman. Do you not realise how few men there are like that?"

"Yes, indeed, I *fully realise it*," and she looked for a moment, laughing, across the carriage. "My life is a very unique one."

Then she began to question him about his parish, and he found her knowledge of the management of the poor of no mean standard.

"I sometimes come down to Leighton Buzzard," she said; "and may I come and see you and your wife?"

He looked at her, exquisitely dressed in her rough black serge and dainty, filmy skirt of mauve lawn and lace; and thought of his homely little wife with her clothes utterly devoid of all taste.

"Please do come and see our little vicarage, and my little wife, with our three children."

They talked on and on, till Charing Cross was about to be reached. Then she put on her gloves, took a thick white gauze veil from her bag, tied it round her face and neck, and said—

"My husband has his motor here, I expect; but it is not good-bye, Mr. Pemberton, only *au revoir*. What a strange little journey we've had."

The clergyman could no longer see her face, it was entirely hidden by the veil. He looked out of the window far ahead, and standing in the station as they steamed in he saw David Bodley. She saw his quick look at her, and answered it—

"Yes, Mr. Pemberton, you're quite right;

David Bodley is as you knew him years ago. I've got one husband who is all you said of him, but *I make up one, an ideal one, purely imaginary*; that keeps me alive, that makes life *possible*. He is only a myth! But who knows, in the future he may be the *real*, and the present one the myth. My Ideal Husband will be mine some day. Perhaps, Mr. Pember-ton, when I introduce you to him up there," and she pointed upwards, "you will recognise my tall, strong, dark man who comes to cheer me on my difficult path. That is, in the next world it will be all right. Don't be angry with me deceiving you" (this was all said in a hurried, low voice); "David Bodley kills me *mentally*, so I, to keep myself alive, live in imagination of what might have been. He doesn't exist, so there's nothing wrong really in it."

The door opened, and David Bodley said in a cold, hard voice—

"Here you are at last. I've waited a solid half hour."

"So sorry, David," he heard her gentle voice reply, "but the boat was late at Folkestone."

He saw her follow her husband, while a maid appeared with a porter for her things. He saw it all—and he saw in imagination the lips tightly press together, and the smiles die away, and the poor weary eyes reign paramount in their weariness.

“God help her!” he said with bated breath. “Married to that brute—and fighting so hard. God help her, no one else can.”

CHAPTER II

FIVE YEARS AFTER

“HOMBURG.

“MY DEAR WIFE,—I am ever so much better, thank God, and the waters are doing me endless good.

“You remember that fascinating woman, Mrs. Bodley, who came down to see us? Well, she is here—looking terribly thin and ill. It is a most extraordinary thing for Mr. Bodley to let her come alone; but so it is, only her maid with her. Really she looks as if she could only live a very short time. You know what a brute I think her husband; well, you remember all I told you about her Ideal Husband?—a myth which made life possible,—*well! he is here in the flesh!*

“Of course everyone wants Mrs. Bodley at their villas, to sing with that glorious voice

of hers. She fascinates everybody, and so is, of course, not lonely. .

“Lawrence Durrant is here, who, when I met with his little sister at the waters the other morning, worried me so to remember where I had met him. He is the next heir to Lord Haverton’s title, and, if you remember, we met him there last summer. His sister is a delicate girl, and he brings her here every year. My heart sank when I saw Mrs. Bodley and him talking together,—he is her ideal—for I realised in a glance here was the man she had exactly described.

“He does not pretend, when I spoke to him about her, that there is anyone he has ever met to compare with her. Here I come face to face with an absolute tragedy. To her it must be like a statue coming to life ! I dare not even ask her anything ; I am watching these two—beyond reproach—absolutely ashonourable as they can be, yet staring blank despair in the face.

“She is coming for a walk with me this afternoon, and then I will write, my dear, and tell you if she says anything.

"Yes, she did say something. She told me the doctor tells her her lungs are so badly touched that she must be prepared 'for the worst.'

"She laughed when she told me. 'I call it "for the best,"' she said.

"Well, then, of course she faced the subject of the Ideal Man. She knew I had seen that all she had described to me five years ago was in the flesh here, namely, Mr. Durrant.

" 'You understand,' she said, 'how I know God has sent me this vision—which is now revealed in the living man himself. Lawrence Durrant knows nothing of my strange ideal dream of married life. He has never said a word of any sort of why he never married or about his life. Yet when I was introduced to him, and looked into his face, I knew he knew everything. I know he is the one man I love, and he knows the same. It is almost weird, if the whole thing was not so plain and devoid of all subterfuge.

" 'The question now is, ought I to stay on here? *He* cannot leave because of his sister.'

"Mrs. Bodley and I were walking up and

down in the wood ; as I glanced at her swinging slowly her *en tout cas* backwards and forwards I was astonished at her utter self-control. Not a trace of emotion ; calm, and yet perfectly natural.

“ ‘ God has sent Lawrence Durrant while I am here on earth, instead of only allowing us to meet in heaven—as I used to think would be the place. But now comes the question. Is it right to allow myself this intense joy? And you are to tell me. Hit as hard as you like, if you wish.’ She smiled straight into my face, and her lips did not even tremble.

“ Oh, my dear wife, I absolutely groaned inwardly. Most persons would have told me I ought not to hesitate for a moment to tell her to leave Homburg. How I prayed. I don’t think I ever asked so urgently, or felt my own utter inadequacy to answer such a question.

“ She broke in upon my silence—

“ ‘ Don’t think we ever say what the whole world might not hear ; but the fact remains, I know it is equally everything to him for us to be together. It means *everything*,’ she

repeated. Then she stood still and faced me.

“‘Yet never for one moment do I forget I am David’s wife. Am I doing wrong or not?’

“‘No,’ came my answer; ‘but you must not stay; this happiness is not yours to have.’

“I looked up to see the effect of my words. Not by a quiver of her face did she reveal her feelings. I know you women are ten times braver than we men; my dear, I’ve seen you face things scores of times impossible to the majority of us—mere men!! Well, what did she do next, but just smiled on me and said—

“‘Yes, you are right. God sends the lifting of the veil sometimes to those whose life is dark, but we have to pass on. I have had the vision, I am to pass out of the light.’ And then she turned, and I, following her gaze, saw Durrant coming towards us, and when he joined us we strolled into the wood.

“My dear, in this letter I indeed tell you of strange things. We three walked on and on, discussing and agreeing in such a way that an hour went as though it had only thirty minutes to its use.

“When we neared the Elizabethan Promenade, Mrs. Bodley said—

“‘I am leaving to-morrow. I have not been able to tell either of you before, because I did not know it myself.’

“My dear, I *couldn't* look at him. I felt agony in that moment too deeply to trust myself to speak. A dead silence followed. Then at last he spoke—

“‘I shall see you off from Frankfort’; not a trace more emotion than she had shown.

“‘Thank you,’ she answered; ‘please, yes. Won’t you bring Tiny with you?’ (that is Durrant’s sister).

“‘No; you will be sure to have a crowded train; it is better for her not. Don’t tell her you asked or it will disappoint her. Here she is.’ And Tiny appeared, my dear; such a small feminine replica of her tall handsome brother, but whereas he is strength itself, with, I should say, an iron constitution, she is delicate. That strange hereditary trick of voice, however, she has, which in the man as well as the woman has always, I think, such a charm. It is a strange drop in the tone at exactly the right

word ; it always charms me greatly. I believe, do you know, it comes from those as a rule who are very true.

“ ‘Of course I mean you to come,’ she said, turning on me. ‘Mr. Durrant *asserts* he is coming, and so I *command* you.’ ”

“Then I saw him look at her, and somehow, my dear little wife, his look conveyed to my mind more than if we had had hours of talk over the matter. He might have been regarding an angel of whom, by the decree of God, he had been deputed to take charge. It was as passionless as a mother’s glance, but, on the other hand, it contained love of the sort few men even know the shadow of.

“The look said, ‘An army may come with you, but it is I and I alone who take you.’ ”

“This man shows me what I have always known was possible, and yet what I have never met with before.

“My dear, I hope I don’t bore you with this long letter, but the whole story is so like a novel that I really think it will interest you as much as it does me.

“I am putting in to-morrow night my Frankfort experiences.

“They all, of course, came to see her off here, and I will say this for the people who had entertained Mrs. Bodley, that they had never coupled Durrant’s name with hers. Perhaps the fact that this woman (as all can see) will not be amongst us long, may have prevented their usually scandalous tongues attacking her. The train was not very crowded, fortunately, and on arriving at Frankfort we had not long to wait for her train. But before she took her place I heard Durrant say, and although my back was towards them, they knew perfectly that their voices reached me—

“‘I knew you would go like this ; it was no *real* surprise to me.’ She was silent, and he went on, ‘I suppose you would prefer me not to write ?’

“‘I think not, please ; you see it is no use.’

“‘No, it’s no use.’

“And, dear wife, the silent despair in those two faces, as I turned, may I never have to witness again.

“I cannot write you any more ; it is past midnight, and I am utterly undone by my day at Frankfort, and seeing the awful incomprehensibility of life. How *hard* it is for us happy ones to realise the misery of meeting the right one too late.

“Believe me there is a misery for some in the marriage state that I know is a living hell.

“Good-night ; I’m not going to allow myself another word to you even, patient little listener that you are.”

Two days later the Reverend John Pemberton received this letter from his wife—

“MY JOHN—DEAR HUSBAND—I have read and re-read your letter. How my heart aches for those two. And do you know, dear, I’ve been praying for that unhappy man, her husband ; he ought to be pitied. Oh, why didn’t he try to win her love ? Well, now it is all over and his chance with her gone for ever, and I have to tell you something.

“Now, dear John, her doctor (Mr. Bodley’s)

CONVERSATIONS OVERHEARD
IN THE PARK

CONVERSATIONS OVERHEARD IN THE PARK

SUNDAY.

“DON’T, Master Tommy, swing your legs like that; a great boy of five too.”

“Mummy lets me swing my legs, Nana.”

“I cannot help that, Master Tommy; you will not do it while you are out with me.”

“You are an unkind Nana. I don’t like you one morsel!”

“That’s very rude, Master Tommy, to talk like that, and I shall take you home.”

“Don’t care if you do. But, Nana” (coaxing voice), “*do* let me swing my legs, and then I won’t tell Mummy how awful cross you looked when your soldier-man was walking with Teddy’s Nana!”

SUNDAY.

"They say Buxton ought to have got in right enough for B——, but one or two nasty things cropped up against him."

"Really? Well he has got a good-looking wife and daughter; they ought to have pulled the election off for him."

"Yes; only, you see, that affair some years ago got dished up afresh. No good! Elton came in quite easily after that story got circulated; Elton's the better man really. Blessed if that man Berkly isn't walking over there got up like any duke! and there last week if he didn't go bankrupt. I believe it's quite the best thing to do, I do really. Pay your bills regularly and you're a sort of idiotic goody-goody in the eyes of nine people out of ten. Owe money right and left and everyone thinks you are wealthy! Rotten state of affairs really."

SUNDAY.

"No, Jim, I've tried my hardest; and mother says I am a wicked flirt, and never by any

chance dance with a man who could *possibly* afford to marry me, and that the Pearsons' dance is impossible for me to go to under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"Oh, that John has been refused by Nora Pearson. You see, he wanted to make her my sister-in-law!"

"Pussy, what am I to do? I shall have no one to dance with, and be bored to death."

"You see, Jim, you go on making love to me week in and week out, and no one seems to mind, because you've got scarcely a penny and me a halfpenny; but, Jim, it won't do. Mother says you keep all the better men away" (laughter).

"Do you mind, Pussy?"

"Not in the least."

"Then I shall continue to do so. Here's the dear old Governor; he's awfully fond of you, Pussy. Perhaps some day——"

SUNDAY.

"Don't be so absurd, John. I was obliged to ask them to dinner. How ridiculous you are!"

“My dear Mary, trade’s awful, never known it so bad, and yet you will go on asking Tom, Dick, and Harry, and Heaven knows who, to *dinner*. We Peat-Weares are far too generous with our money.”

“What’s the good of your telling me to save, if you go and give five hundred pounds for that Park hack you’ll ride about five times this season and then tire of? Talk about women being inconsistent! you men beat all the women. Oh, John, there go the Nutalls! Do bow, do; she’s such a good-looking woman and charming.”

“All your geese are swans. I don’t see anything pretty about her. I’m bored to death and going home.”

SUNDAY.

“Been to church, Dick?”

“Yes, I went this morning; but, my goodness, I never felt more inclined to say, ‘Look here, young man, if I was your father I’d just horsewhip you, and make you read in a voice that is intellegible!’

“It is disgraceful the way our Church of England clergy read; half the time you cannot

understand a word. They collect for everything; a good deal better if they began to get some money for a college for elocution! The finest Book in the world! and yet scarcely any man reads it out properly. Better not get me on this subject, Ben, I'm uncomfortably hot over it."

MONDAY.

"Mummy, may I swing my legs?"

"Yes, Tommy child, if it amuses you. Look here, Tommy, here comes Mr. Elton. I want to go to the 'House' to-night and hear him make his maiden speech."

"What's a maiden speech, Mummy?"

"Well, Tommy, when you first said 'Daddy, Daddy,' that was your maiden speech."

"Oh! were those my first words, Mummy darling?"

"Yes, Tommy."

"And what was your maiden speech to me, Mummy?"

"Well, I don't quite remember, because I was very ill, but we cuddled very close together, and I kissed you and kissed you, till,

Tommy, I thought you would be kissed away."

"And did I kiss you back, Mummy, and try and kiss you away?"

"No, you screwed up your little face and stuck your little fist into my face."

"Mummy" (laughing), "I *was* rude, Mummy darling, but now *I* kiss you nearly all away, don't I? You said so last night after you tucked me up."

MONDAY MORNING IN THE PARK.

He looked down at her from his horse in the Row; she was leaning against the iron rail, her face raised to his, evidently asking some question. He was weighing his words before he answered, as his eyes were gazing far away; then whatever he *did* say was with his head bent over her, and her little hand stroked the horse's silky neck. Then she moved to the horse's head, stroked his velvety nose, and whispered to the horse, "Dandy, take your master for a lovely gallop, because I'm so happy, as I am going to the Pearsons,—yes,

the Pearsons' ball to-night. Mother has given her permission, and we shall dance all night together!"

MONDAY.

"Are you dining at the Peat-Weares to-night, Harry?"

"Yes; are you, Dick?"

"Yes, worse luck. They *are* dull. You know he's a Jew really, and changed his name."

"She isn't, poor soul."

"No, she isn't."

"Goodness, what a life hers must be! Worthy, good woman, and her vast family worship her, but I can't imagine a greater trial than old Peat-Weares. I will say he rides a good hack!"

"Well, the actual *dinner* will be excellent, and let's trust that there will be someone there to make things 'hum' a bit. The eldest girl we'll get to sing; it's a pretty voice, and she's delightful if they'd only let her dine instead of keeping her in the drawing-room because of that absurd custom of not being out! What

asses Society rule-makers must have been to think of such a thing as that."

MONDAY.

Strong American accent.

Don't think much of you.

“WHO SHALL SAY?

“WHO SHALL SAY?”

THIS is a true little story, and shows how a woman may be in the dark concerning the love of a man. She told it me herself, and thus, as I know, she would be one of the last to imagine anyone in love with her without it being an absolute fact, so every word is true.

She is dead now ; her married life turned out, from the human point of view, a failure, and a most unhappy one. When I first knew her, she was fifteen. I used to frequent her house very often. She was an only girl, not exactly pretty, but had a strange charm of manner. I might say with truth she was one of the most fearless and original women I ever met ; nothing ever deterred her from doing a thing because it was “not proper.” Her utter recklessness as regards what people

said of her was one of her strong points, and *in the eyes of Mother Grundy* "woefully wrong."

I have seen her argue with men more than double her age with a cleverness and adroitness which always amazed me. Her ideas of right and wrong never deviated. She held her course for the highest, and yet with her wondrous high ideals she was intensely human and irresistibly humorous, yet a mass of impetuous faults. She could keep many men and women entertained with her comically told little stories.

Well, when I knew her at fifteen I always felt there was something to befall her. Her eyes were too tragic for one so young; at seventeen she looked twenty. I was staying in the house, acting with her in private theatricals. A clever barrister, Tom Lucas, whom she had known for many years, was also acting. I used to watch him. I used to see his eyes following her everywhere, and yet if she spoke to him he only teased her. Never could she get him to be serious. He was half as old again as she—a plain little man, with not a

stainless career behind him. But I noticed, what no one else seemed to, that this girl of seventeen was to him everything.

Audrey, a cousin of Elsie's, was acting too, and as I stood waiting to be “called” (we were deeply immersed in theatricals) Elsie said—

“Are you surprised? Mrs. Napier tells me that Mr. Lucas is devoted to Audrey?”

I started. Did Mrs. Napier tell Elsie this with some double meaning?

I shook my head. Elsie looked strangely bewitching, with her cheeks slightly rouged, and I watched her intently for a moment. Oh, how I *longed* to say “My dear child, cannot you see Lucas has eyes only for you?” But she seemed so young, standing with her pretty brown hair waving on her shoulders, and the slight figure clad in a short frock—for she was playing a schoolgirl's part.

“Does Audrey care for *him*?” I asked.

“Yes, sometimes I think so and sometimes not. Dear Audrey, I'd like her to marry as clever a man as Mr. Lucas; he is splendidly clever.”

We never referred to the subject again, but long after, when she had been married about five years, — she was then twenty-five or twenty-six,—we got talking of old days.

We were seated in her boudoir; a weird blue light fell across the room from the blazing wood-fire. Her boudoir always had a delightfully soothing influence on me, for I was a hard-worked doctor; but to-night a feeling of something approaching awe—something impossible to define—told me that Elsie Forrest was unhinged, distressed beyond all words. She looked very unhappy. I noticed deep lines round her gentle brown eyes. Her little girl of three had been playing on her knee, and now, she having left us, silence reigned.

She was standing—leaning against a high-backed chair. Women's dress always had a charm for me. Her dress was made of pale mauve clinging material, a simple piece of exquisite lace was gathered round her neck. The firelight leaped and fell upon her standing in the twilight.

“Have you heard about Mr. Lucas?” she

asked in a far-away sort of tone with no life in it.

I replied, "What have you heard?"

"He shot himself in his room this morning."

"What could have caused him to do that?"

I asked this without daring to look into her face.

"I want you to be my judge concerning Mr. Lucas, dear Dr. Weaves. It will only take a few moments to tell you, it's such a little story. You can wait?"

I nodded.

She spoke slowly, with a steady determined voice, which, however, every now and then faltered. I had never seen her deeply moved, never realised till then, as I sat in the deepening shadows, what Elsie Forrest would have been if married to the right man. In one flash the whole of the depth of her nature revealed itself as I sat in silence.

"Well," she went on, "we had been out riding (we often used to, quite alone). It is so strange how I remember every detail as

though yesterday. He had been telling me of his life abroad. It was very, very hot, and I can remember coming in, taking off my hat, and sitting down with my habit held in one hand. He came and seated himself on the big writing-table by my side. He who was never serious with me took hold of my hand that was disengaged by the wrist, and told me he loved me. I, well I, girl-like (for girls of seventeen cannot understand true love in a man nearly thirty) told him I could not marry him. It is impossible for me to tell you what he said; he said so little and yet so much. On looking back, how plainly I can see it, the dulness of the room, for the sun shone outside but the room was in shadow. My hair must have been all tumbled with taking off my riding hat, and for him to take me by the *wrist* was *strange* I think. I can feel now how thick my habit felt; and he sitting on a table almost conveys a flippant idea, yet no one could have been in deadlier earnest. He sat with an expression—girl as I was—I shall never forget, and yet, oh, how little I understood! His love must have grown simply

from the fact of my being an exact opposite to himself, and so he loved me for that. Brilliantly clever, and to care for me! *Such a little ignoramus*” (and she smiled sadly). “It was, I suppose, the greatest honour he could pay me; but why had he never by the *smallest* look or word ever let me know he cared? To tease me and ridicule me as he did, and yet under all that lay a mine of love, which was too deeply hidden I think for anyone to even guess. You never did, did you?”

“Yes,” I nodded again. “Yes, I knew it.”

“Why didn’t you tell me then?”

“How could I when you seemed such a child; and another thing, he was not over straight.”

“Ah! there comes *the point*; there comes my ever-anxious question. He went right away to the bad when I told him it was impossible. He was staying with us, and I remember that night his face, it was more than pallid, and next morning green—a pale green. That man who, I had always thought,

despised my silly ways ; loved me as he had never loved, I know now. Well, what a tiny strand is the thickness of that which divides love and hate. Needless to say he never asked me again, and in fact hardly ever spoke to me ; but two years after, when I got married, his love all turned to hate ; he so hated me I believe he could have killed me. It was awful," and she shivered. " Well, to-day his mother has been here ; she told me *I had caused her son's death !*"

There was a dead silence ; neither felt inclined to break it, for she had asked me to judge, judge *her* ?

Then I rose, and she spoke again—

" Do not give me your verdict ; it was unfair to ask. Some day I shall know."

" Till then I know you will take no man's verdict."

" No ; but still how those lines of Rossetti's haunt me, for I truly believe we are allowed to go on in the next world working out forgiveness for our misspent lives, and I cannot see why we may not pray for our ones that are gone. Let me say Rossetti's lines

to you, and then you will understand more my feelings—

“Clearly his own fault—yet I think
My fault in part who did not pray,
But lagged and would not lead the way,
I, haply, proved his missing link.
God help us both to mend and pray.”

I went and stood by her side, and took her hand for a moment.

“My dear child, do not blame yourself. No no, a thousand times no! it was *not* your fault.”

I left her and went hurrying home, once more the inexplicable haunted me. That morning I had been called in to see poor Tom Lucas’s body. I did not know his mother had been to Elsie till she told me.

The next morning the paper announced that he had committed suicide; but I still maintain that it was not Elsie’s refusal, but the life he had led. If his life had been different, I am sure this story would have had no such sad ending. But who can say?

“ I BELIEVE IN THE
COMMUNION OF SAINTS ”

“I BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS”

HE had come home from India ill,—just about as ill as he could be after years of Indian soldier life,—and he had come back to England and gone to his old favourite inn in Somerset. They welcomed him back with a welcome!—a welcome which grew from their love of him from a boy. His father and mother were still alive, but, somehow, although capable of getting through to his own home that night, he preferred resting at the inn where as boy and man he had passed many summers. It had dear memories. And now to-night he seated himself (after a quaint little meal, perfectly but simply served) in a stiff-backed, old wooden chair drawn up to the fire. He was cold—the heat of India had made him dreadfully susceptible to changes in the temperature.

As he glanced round at the beautiful old carved oak window-frame, and carved old panels of wood, he drew a long sigh. No one had known why he hadn't married ; if anyone had ever tried to ask the question, he invariably avoided a direct reply by saying, "For the simple fact that I preferred not." His friendships with men and women were many, yet his name never got linked to any woman's. He always treated them all exactly in the same way, and so avoided scandal.

He looked round the room again ; got up, turned out the one old bright gas-jet over the table, stirred the fire vigorously, and sat down, gazing into it with his deep-set eyes ; then he closed his eyes and put a hand over his face. No, he *didn't* fancy it ! He always swore to himself afterwards that it was not his imagination. She came in quite silently and stood the other side of the fire—with her hands clasped tightly together, just as he had so often seen her in the old days in that position. His heart seemed to stand still, then to give a bound ! He thought she must hear it beat in its thumping, thumping so violently against

his side. And yet when he heard her voice all his old calmness returned, and they spoke as they had always done—in little, short, comprehensive sentences.

“I’ve come, you see,” she said very quietly.

“Yes,” he replied, without moving.

“It grieves me you are ill, but your fever won’t last long in England. I’m always so sorry when a man is ill; it seems so much harder for him to bear than for a woman.” He felt the look in those gentle eyes.

“Does it? It’s only a matter of education after all, and I’m getting quite used to it.”

“How beautiful this dear old room looks! Just as it did in those happy days long ago. Do some people always have those happy days by right?”

“Yes, I believe so. I’ve known couples in fact—but then——”

“Yes, I know,” she said quickly, catching him up as she always used to, “they were not for us.”

He longed to ask her endless questions, but dared not even raise his eyes lest she fled; yet he saw her distinctly.

"How did you get here?" he asked.

"My guardian angel brought me."

"It seems impossible we are *really* together," he sighed. And then he went on, "In my imagination I've so often put you in the corner seat opposite me in a railway carriage, and talked to you, and ridden with you—but *that's* been all imagination—and made up our conversation, only you *wouldn't* say what I wanted always." She smiled.

"How disagreeable of me. But it wouldn't have been natural; would it, if I had?" He knew she smiled, but he dared not look up.

"No," he replied, "I suppose not."

"When I was here," she said, "you wanted to make me *perfect*; but no, that again is not natural to *me*. I want to tell you," and he felt she held out a hand in a blessing gesture, "I've only come to say I am not going to be here much longer. God wants me, and that means you very soon. Our work has to be together—our work has to be together!" He saw the far-away look in her eyes as she repeated the words over slowly.

"Thank God!" broke from his pale lips.

“Yes, thank God,” she repeated slowly.

“I know it all,” she continued. “How you and I have to go and win a poor lost soul we both loved here. I cannot tell it you all now—but you will understand, as I do, soon.” A silence. Then he said—

“I am not paying you a compliment, I couldn’t. But why haven’t you grown old-looking as I have?” He knew she smiled.

“Because you don’t see *me* really, only my spirit, and that’s young, as is yours.” Then she added slowly, “I must go now. I bless you, as I always have, and as I always shall—but *now* it is no longer good-bye—only for a little while . . .” And he knew she was gone. He sat on and on, and the light flickered and fell in the fire, and then went out. . . .

The next morning, in the *Times*, he read, “Sudden death of Lady Florence Miles.” And as he slowly laid the paper down he knew then that she *had* come, and through his lips escaped the cry, “God, I believe in the Communion of Saints. Help me to follow her.”

AT ALL COSTS”

“ AT ALL COSTS ”

MARJORY DEEN sat rocking herself slowly one summer's day ; her book lay open on her lap. She was reading a powerful story of self-sacrifice and devotion. Gazing out into the park and meadows beyond, shining in the afternoon sun, she thought--

“ I wonder if *I* am capable of any great deed of self-sacrifice ? ” Then, in a resolute tone, “ I should like to be. ” Her eyes shone with a wondrous light when truly moved, otherwise Marjory Deen was a girl of strange quietness ; merry, yes, but devoid of excitement. There was no rare beauty in her face, but it was rare in expression ; tender and sympathetic, with the sweetest mouth and pearly teeth ; she had dark brown hair, with a slight wave in it, worn in a thick coil on her neck ; brown

hazel eyes; a small, well-proportioned nose, and a complexion tanned with sun and wind.

Marjory Deen had arrived from her home in the country to stay with an old school-friend, Mabel Spaites, in Scotland, a wealthy, only child; whereas Marjory's father was a country parson, a widower, blessed with hardly any income, and this one child (his sole earthly possession), needless to say, had had any amount of love showered on her. It was with somewhat mild protests on her part that Marjory left her father yesterday morning to come and stay two weeks with her school-fellow; never had they been together since their boarding-school days. And now Marjory had arrived to find her friend unable to meet her on account of a bazaar held miles away. Half the neighbourhood would have been in arms if pretty Mabel Spaites had not "sold." Marjory had found a letter assuring her she would be back not later than six o'clock, and asking her to make herself comfortable and read a book she strongly recommended.

Do authors, I wonder, ever think what effect

on young souls their words convey? Lives have so often been moulded on some strong character, or unhappily affected just in an opposite way.

She sat on quietly reading for about half an hour ; then, with a deep-drawn sigh, she closed the book.

“ Yes,” she said gravely, “ *that* woman knew what self-sacrifice meant ; to give up the man you love for the woman you love. But *then* comes the awful question, Do you ruin his life if he loves you ? *What* a position ! God,” she continued, speaking below her breath, “ if ever I am so placed, oh ! guide me at whatever cost to do the right.”

How often God’s messenger conveys to our hearts prayers we scarcely dream are ever to be answered, and we utter them earnestly and with a vague feeling of awe.

Suddenly broke upon her thoughts merry, laughing voices, and as they came nearer Marjory rose and went out. She stood still, for coming towards her was Mabel, and beside her a man ; very tall, broad, yet of such good proportions as not to show his height ; neither

handsome nor plain, with features no one ever attempted to describe ; but it was the truth of *the gaze of dark, honest grey eyes that met hers !* She forgot the face was plain, and saw a face of a man of no excesses, who had the depth of the man's character in his eyes. The girl's instinct told her his was a nature he had made subordinate to his own will. His eyes attracted her with almost a mesmeric interest. He had a particularly deep love of all simple things in life. She stood with one arm round Mabel's waist, drinking in with an amused smile the description of the bazaar, told in language which really at times amounted to brilliancy in its audacious imitation of some of the stall-holders. They sauntered round the grounds, and then at length the gong sounded for dressing. Then Marjory hoped she was to hear who the man was (for the introduction had been somewhat vague, "Dick Elton, a distant cousin of mine"); she was doomed to be disappointed. Mabel's mother wished to speak to her, and Marjory went into her beautiful bedroom with a strange wonder and awe at the lavish wealth which pervaded the whole

house, and which in her quiet little country vicarage was a thing only to be dreamed of. She smiled almost pathetically as she glanced at her little, dark-green, brocade satin frock, with its sombre flower pattern, laid out upon the bed. “My *frock*,” she said to herself, “won’t cause envy amongst the guests to-night,” and she went and laid her hand gently on it. “I love you, little gown, because father took such pains to choose you for this plain little person. He was right, he always is, because there is an old-world look about you, and you make me dream my Fairy Prince *might* like you. My Fairy Prince ! Yet he must not come to take me away. What would father do ?” And so musing, she dressed.

An hour after, she entered the drawing-room somewhat timidly, for several guests had arrived, and after speaking to her host she slipped away to a side-table, where she pretended to be looking at an illustrated volume of the house and grounds, etc. ; but really she was noting the men and women ; some interested her, and others passed as those not to be dwelt on. Suddenly a voice said by her

side, "Why don't you take that *interesting* volume to a chair?"

She looked up, amused at the slight tone of sarcasm.

"Forgive me, Miss Deen, but I presume I may say your old brocade makes me feel inclined to say 'Forsooth and prithee, dear lady, may a chair be offered?'" he made her a profound bow as he drew the chair to her side.

"Thou hast a pretty wit, methinks, sir, or rather, an audacious one!"

They both laughed, for she had so quickly fallen to his banter. And then once more came the quick, searching glance from those dark grey eyes which held hers; for a moment she allowed herself to look with a silent wonder.

"Do you live ~~near~~ here, Mr. Elton?" she asked, not quite knowing why she said it.

"Yes, very near—in the house. You see I'm Sir Walter's secretary. I want to go into Parliament myself some day, and it is the best training a man can have; you know he is one of the Conservative Whips. He is very good to me, and I am very happy here with them all."

"And Mabel?"

He had a habit of biting his under lip at the corner sometimes; he did so now, and nodded his head slowly—

"Yes, and Mabel."

"What are you saying about me, you two wicked people?"

"That you add happiness wherever you are," said Marjory gently.

"Thank you," and she stooped and kissed her friend's pretty head. "Would you two like to go into dinner together? Because I have had to alter some places at the last moment; two people have not come. Dick, by the way, where are we joining the shooters at lunch to-morrow?"

"Deans Hole; we are 'driving,' you see, and that place won't disturb the birds. How many women are coming out?"

"Well, Dick, your voice doesn't sound overjoyed at the thought of fair women gracing the butts!"

"Not if fair women *will* wear light-coloured hats, and bright coats, etc. I know three over there who I am *certain*

will drive all the birds back by their brilliant attire."

"No, Dick, I won't allow them to, I won't really. And, you will see, I shall arrive with four sombre females besides myself—and one of those is Marjory."

"Dinner is served."

And in the ten couples streamed, talking, laughing; and last but one came Marjory and Dick Elton.

"We've to drink Mabel's health of course to-night—by Jove! I nearly forgot it," said Dick Elton. "It's her twentieth birthday. You see the King allows his health to be drunk in water, so I may be permitted to drink hers. And *you*, Miss Deen? Well now, I'd have bet you were, somehow,——" Then lowering his voice, "I hate the stuff!—the men I've known go to the dogs over it, and women too. Well, well, we're strange mortals; but it's the only thing I'm practical over, I loathe alcohol of all kinds. I daresay it will stump me getting into Parliament some day, *or* the other thing," and he laughed gaily. "But now we've got *one* thing, at all events, in common, Miss Deen.

Tell me what you do all day ? ” Marjory heard Dick Elton say very quietly (he had a sudden way of dropping his voice). “ Do you hunt ? ”

She shook her head. “ I used, as a child on a pony ; but now we’ve still got the pony, and are, you see, not able to afford a horse. Father and I live in just the prettiest rectory you have seen, at Berry, with a beautiful old-world garden, which father and I work in nearly all day when we are not looking after the villagers.”

He quietly looked at her ; his strong face was unusually serious, and his voice was inaudible to anyone else as he said—

“ Only you two ? ”

“ Only we two. You see we’re just all the world to each other. Mother died when I was tiny, I never remember her ; and so I’ve had to be wife and daughter and son to father. You’ve never seen anyone so absolutely splendid as my father ! ” She looked up for the first time, and met his interested gaze, and she smiled. “ You think I’m biased about my good father, but I’m not ; and some day you will say so, when I introduce you to him.”

“Very well,” he said, still more seriously than was his wont. “I will come and see him whenever you ask me.”

“But you know it is a very tiny little rectory. We can give you no shooting or fishing. I *might* take you out cub hunting, but that is all I have to offer, and a beautiful old garden.”

He looked at her quietly as she helped herself to a dish handed to her. He was overpowered by the latent self-control of so young a woman. For the first time in his life he wanted to be seated somewhere alone listening to that quiet, soothing, and yet merry voice. He had very hazy ideas about love. No woman had ever made him feel ready to give up everything for her sake; no woman had ever made him pass even a wakeful night with thoughts of her,—and here suddenly had come into his life a woman whom to be with was quite different from anything he had ever known. For the life of him, that night, on going to his room, as he analysed his feelings, he could not understand himself.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “after a good blow

to-morrow up at those butts I shall feel better.”

But to-morrow came, and he found himself asking Marjory to come into a butt which had the longest “wait.” And so it was Marjory found herself on a low stone, covered with a man’s ulster, sitting in a butt which, placed as she was, was wind sheltered. The day was a glorious day for Scotland, and Dick Elton and she sat talking in the deepest whispers, for she had been trained to hardly *breathe* when near grouse.

The man looked very well in his shooting kit, crouching down—his face all alert with watching—catching the whispered words of his companion.

“How long are you going to stay?”

“Ten days or a fortnight.”

“Do you *love* Scotland?”

“Yes; I was born in the Highlands, but I’ve not got Scotch parents.”

“Do you fish?”

“Yes, a little.”

“Will you come fishing to-morrow? It’s an off day from shooting.”

“Certainly”; and for the first time *she* looked into his eyes as they turned to hear her answer.

“We will get up a party.”

Then followed a long silence. Marjory put some cartridges on to her lap.

“Shall I give you these for reloading? I used to do it for another friend when he was shooting.”

He nodded. *Was* anyone such a fool, he wondered silently, as *he* was, to absolutely be worried to know who the man was she used to load for?

“If you put your hand behind you, as your ejector shoots the cartridge out, I slip into your hand two of these. I don’t think I shall worry.”

He laughed a little low laugh, and said, “Thank you, I will tell you if you do.”

It was a strange half-hour in that butt; their whispered words even were rare. In fact, when the birds *did* at last come “thick and fast,” no one looking on would have guessed what that half-hour had meant to the man who, keen sportsman as he was, had realised for the first time in his life that he was with a woman who made life “live” with an extra-

ordinary unconsciousness and power. Her occasional soft whispered words he found to contain a depth and interest no woman's words had ever exercised before. As she got up and shook herself, and began folding up the coat, he said—

"Did you mark those two birds over the brook?"

"Yes; they fell one to the right of the tree and the other at that gate."

"Thank you."

"Shall I go and show the boy? The dog's not near them." Without another word she laid down the coat and was picking her way through the heather.

The man stood watching her. In the ordinary way he would have gone himself, but with her it was different. He understood she wished to go, and that for him to have done it would have taken away a pleasure. He strolled slowly after her, and soon all the party were once more trudging along to the next set of butts.

The fishing the next day was of a satisfactory kind. The luck which always attends

the beginner attended Marjory; for, only having thrown a fly once or twice in her life before, it was no small joy to her to "strike" at the right moment; and so after half an hour's patiently "playing her fish" she landed her 9 lb. salmon. Dick Elton was her gilly, and so told her of likely pools, etc. Their little lunch, done up in a rush basket, was eaten under a tree by the salmon stream.

Such is our life!. We live with people for a lifetime, and never know them; we reside under a roof for two or three days with a kindred spirit, and we wonder if we have anything more we can learn about them, so perfect is the understanding on each side. Dick Elton's self-control was, as it seemed to a keen observer, self-mastery, for he was not born to an easy temper, or passionless, or colourless in any way; but he was a character to whom cutting off the arm, or plucking out the eye, if it offended, became a *law*. He had fought out his own belief inch by inch, and had come to a firm rock of strength in a deep-rooted faith in God and Christ. The highest things were his aims. He hardly, if ever,

thought of himself, and if he did, it was in a truly humble way. He was well read ; took the greatest interest in the welfare of the world, longing for the time when he should have a right to sit in Parliament. Women had played no eventful part in his life ; but with men he had several great friendships. These usually looked upon Dick Elton as a coming statesman ; and so he eventually was.

He found Marjory quite a cultured little soul, educated by her father, although her face never gave you warning of the clever brain beneath. Yet her lonely life with an extremely clever father, whose delight it was to impart knowledge to her, had given Marjory Deen those gifts which in after years would make her suited to any life of position.

Dick Elton never took her, all that fishing day, *seriously* ; he little knew—or perhaps, who knows, he may have felt—that she was generally taken very seriously by men, and she, in her turn, to them refused to be serious. This new friend of hers deliberately turned any wise little remark she made, against herself.

And so it was that when about four o'clock they strolled back to tea triumphantly with the salmon, he heard a gentle voice say—

“If, Mr. Elton, you ever take me fishing again, I shall turn the tables, and just tease you as you’ve teased me!—but it hasn’t *hurt*, only it’s so different from what I’m used to.”

Later on the two girls, before dinner, were playing an old duet together in Mabel’s boudoir. Presently, when they had laughed over mistakes and rejoiced over a well-played page, they stopped and began to discuss the guests.

“Dick, isn’t he an absolute dear, Marjory? You see,” she continued, “he is this sort of man—I could put my hand in his and get him to take me across the world; and I could trust him as a brother. Yes, Dick is my idea of a man.”

Marjory nodded. Mabel had got up and was looking out of the window.

“What about Captain Lascelles?” asked Marjory. “He seemed, I thought, a light-hearted boy.”

Mabel was looking fixedly out at the sunset,

and Marjory could not see the glow on her face ; if she *had*, the coming weeks of anguish would perhaps have been avoided.

"Oh, Captain Lascelles ! Why, as to comparing those two, Marjory——"

"No, I wasn't *comparing*," said Marjory gently, "only asking if he were as nice as he appears at first sight?"

"Oh yes ; he's charming *in a way*, but has not a penny. You see, Dick is very wealthy."

Marjory looked at her gravely through the looking-glass reflection over a wood-fire, but said nothing ; her friend's remark hurt her.

"Now, Marjory, we must go downstairs and make ourselves agreeable. Don't look so solemn," and she kissed her lightly on the cheek and drew her from the room with a strange assumed gaiety.

Marjory wondered. What did she mean, was Dick her *true* love, or was it his money ? If Dick Elton loved, why did those grey eyes of his look at *her*, Marjory, so earnestly whenever she had looked into his face ? Was she stealing her friend's lover ? Her head was aching.

"May I go to my room, dear?" Marjory asked. "I want to write to father."

"Yes, *of course*. I've got to go and get all our plans for to-morrow from Dick."

Marjory got her writing-case, and sank down in a deep chair.

"Father," she wrote, "father dear, I wonder, if I want to come home before my fortnight, if you will be angry? You, darling, you won't be I know; but I am not at all sure I shall be able to stay my time out. Isn't it an awful admission to have to make? Somehow I seem to think it would not be very *wicked* if you wrote to me and said you wished me to return—that unforeseen circumstances had arisen that required me at home.—Oh dear! fancy anything of such grave importance ever occurring in our village!—But I know, darling, the sooner I get back to you the better, without offending these dear kind friends."

And so after writing this Marjory felt relieved; *why*, was almost impossible to put into words.

Every day following this letter brought joys of intense profundity; and yet all the time,

stab, stab, went her conscience. Was she doing right? On the fourth morning the letter arrived. It lay by her plate when she came down to breakfast, earlier than anyone else, and found Dick Elton seated, eating his breakfast with a zest that verily only an English sportsman possesses.

"Please don't get up to wait on me. I love picking up my little crumbs by myself; and besides I shall walk steadily round the table eating my porridge. It won't give you 'jumps,' will it?" she added with a merry twinkle.

He laughed. "In London I should actually forbid it; here in Scotland a custom *must* be put up with."

She sat down immediately with her bowl of porridge, and shook her horn spoon from her seat opposite him. "Out of sheer contrariwise I shall *sit* now, and if we ever meet in London shall prance round the table. Only, you see, I fear I shall have to crawl down after all, for I never eat porridge in London. I should feel as out of place as wearing shooting-boots in the Row."

“ Well, I’ve got what *I* want, so I don’t care by what means.”

“ And what is that ? ” she asked, never seeing the trap he had laid.

“ Well, what else could it be, but simply to see you opposite me ! ”

“ Oh ! ” and her face for a moment grew rosy red, “ *why do you say that and spoil it all !* ”

And the plaintive voice never got an answer, for two or three men came in to breakfast. As soon as she could Marjory slipped away, ran upstairs, donned her coat and hat, went into Mabel’s bedroom and asked, if she were back by twelve o’clock, if she would play tennis with her. “ I want to go for a walk in the wood, Mabel ; up to the Mount. May I ? ”

“ Of course,” said Mabel, putting her arm round her and looking into her face. “ Marjory, you don’t look well. What is it ? ”

“ Oh, please, Mabel, I am splendidly well.”

“ Are you ? And are you happy here, dear ? ”

“ Of course I am—very—*please*, you understand, Mabel ; I am.”

“ Yes, Marjory dear, dear little Marjory,”

and the young hostess patted gently the pale cheek. "I wonder if I'm going to *help* you in this world?"

"How do you mean?"

"Only, you see, I love you, and would love to be of *real* service, my Marjory; and I *know* you'd be just the same to me."

A pained look shot across Marjory's face. "Of course I would, Mabel." And with those words ringing in her ears Marjory walked slowly downstairs, and was just opening the garden door when she saw Dick Elton through the little glass door on the other side. He saw her, and there was no other course open but to face things. He was talking to the keeper, and opened the door for her, continuing to talk to the man. She stood for an instant on the threshold.

Such a dainty little form in her brown cloth frock with its short skirt, showing such trim little feet clad in thick brown boots. Her hair looked so glossy and wavy and soft under her white motor-cap; round her neck somehow, somewhere, a scarf of pale, pinky, light crushed-strawberry colour showed itself, in a way that

any artist looking at her would have felt had an irresistible charm. She had a gift of always knowing the tiny touch of colour which *made* her.

"Are you going for a walk?" he asked, with still the happy, teasing expression he had worn at breakfast.

"Yes."

"May I come?"

"No—yes—I think you may follow me up to the Mount in a quarter of an hour; I want to read father's letter first."

He looked grave; in one moment he detected she was in distress.

"Very well," he said gently, so gently that her distressed eyes looked up with a swift glance of thanks. Then she passed rapidly up the path that led to the Mount, about two miles off. And Dick Elton looked at his watch, talked on to the keeper, and then, at the time she had said, bade the keeper come and see him again during the afternoon in the library.

Now Dick Elton had determined that Marjory should be asked to be his wife. He

had gone so far as to believe she *did* care for him, but whether she *loved* him, that he could not decide. He knew he was about to face the most sacred moment of his life. Strangely enough, he almost fully realised what would be the utter emptiness of life if she refused to marry him. He was essentially a man's man; men admired and respected him to an extraordinary degree. Riches had not made him a fool! His parents had spared nothing over his education, and his brains were made of stuff to retain their knowledge. The true inborn gentleman was apparent to the most casual observer. Women had flung themselves at his head, as a rule, but somehow it had not affected him in the least. Politics and sport had been to him his great joy in life, outside that *nothing*. Inwardly to himself he had thought he would never marry, and just because his part in life had been in so opposite a direction, so now it made his fall in, or his grasp of, love so extraordinarily fearless and rare. His thoughts ran somewhat in this train as he walked thoughtfully along the narrow path: “At all events my little

girl won't marry me for my money, because if I had none it would be all the same to her; she won't marry me for my looks; she will marry me for love, and love *only*."

He did not overtake her for some time, and then he found her seated on a low, cross-bar stile of wood and big stones. He came and stood by her. Then she rose, and they faced each other, she one side of the stile and he the other.

"Have you read your letter?"

"Yes—and—I am to go home."

"*So soon?*"

"Yes," and somehow the little plaintive voice drew the honest grey eyes which had been gazing far away over the mountains, to look suddenly with surprise at Marjory's pale face.

"Is there any bad news?" he asked very gently.

"No—only father wants me——"

"Never mind, after all—Marjory," and the little hand lying on the top of the stile was covered by his strong one—"will you listen to me for one minute? I don't know how to

put it—I'm not used to this sort of thing, but I want to tell you——"

But he never finished the sentence. "Don't, don't, Mr. Elton," and Marjory, pale as death and trembling, had covered her face with her hands.

"Why mayn't I tell?" Growing very grave were those grey eyes.

"Because what you were going to ask is impossible."

"Why is it?"

"Because I don't——"

"Don't care for me?"

"No, not that—no, not that——"

"Then, Marjory, as you are true woman, the only love of my life, think, in God's name, what you are doing."

His voice was very low, but with a mighty effort on his part it never even trembled. She never spoke.

"Do you understand? I've never *cared* even for any woman before you, Marjory. I simply can't even think now what life would be without you. Because I love you as my own soul I can't even tell you." The little figure

sat sobbing silently on the wooden bar of the stile.

"I wish I knew *how* to—but, Marjory, surely you don't want *words* to explain."

"No," came the low answer.

She stood up, and she looked at him beseechingly; the dark, thick eyelashes were all wet with tears, but round the sweet mouth was a very determined little line. The eyes and mouth were strangely contracted.

"Mr. Elton, will you *please* not ask me to answer—please I cannot—I've *tried* to think you loved Mabel."

"Why did you try? Do you love someone else? Because if you do, I understand—and shall never trouble you *again*." The voice tried to speak with a hard ring, but it failed. If in his heart he had believed her, it would not have failed; but something kept prompting him that she loved him.

She shook her head, and ignored his question when she next spoke.

"I am going home to-morrow, so I shall *pass* out of your life."

She heard just a slight, low laugh; how she

had got to love that low laugh ; it always sounded so impossible to stifle.

"Do you *really* think, Marjory, you can put me off like that ? Little girl," and he shook his head gravely, while his eyes twinkled with amusement, "you are not going to be let off so easily as that."

Then the girl's whole line of defence changed, and he who imagined he knew every expression of that loved little face realised that there stood the *woman* he loved and not the girl he had known for only ten days.

"Mr. Elton, I am not *trying to put you off*. I am going home to my father. Give me a week at home with him—then come and see him."

He turned wearily away ; he failed to understand.

"Why do you act like this ?"

"Because I am in too complex a position to be able to answer you."

"And during that week am I to hope or not ?"

"No, no ; do not hope—we must *neither* of us hope."

She looked into his sad, grave eyes, and he saw with abject despair the deep determination in hers.

“Then if *neither* of us *may* hope, Marjory, do *you want* to hope?”

“*Want* to hope?” and just the faintest ironical laugh escaped her—“want to hope?”. His two hands were holding the top wooden rail of the stile; she deliberately laid hers on them and looked him searchingly in the face.

“You wouldn’t have me do anything dishonourable, would you?”

“No.” But his face had grown as pale as hers.

“Then I *cannot* answer you for a week”; and with these words she turned deliberately round and walked ~~up~~ the steep path.

He stood watching her with a puzzled expression till she was out of sight, and then slowly retraced his steps.

Two days after Marjory drove up with her old pony and cart to her father’s door. The little maid was standing at the open door to welcome her. After she had spoken to her, she asked—

"Where's father, Mary?"

"In bed, miss."

"*In bed!* and no one ever let me know! Oh, Mary, how wrong!"

"It wasn't my fault, Miss Marjory; your father forbade us to."

"Has he had the doctor?"

"Twice a day sometimes, Miss Marjory."

In another moment Marjory was up the old oak staircase and in her father's room.

"Father," she cried, "how could you not send for me before? Dear, *what* made you ill?" The girl was by him on the bed, with her arms round him.

"A chill, Marjory darling, only a chill. I'm soon going to be all right, I think."

"*Think*, father! why, of course you will, now, with me to nurse you."

The fact was Marjory was a born nurse. She got the verger to come and take a share of the nursing, and never for one moment faltered in her task of devotion; but the old man never really rallied. One day he told her he had a surprise for her; £300 a year had been left her by an old aunt. But Marjory

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was too absorbed in the dying man to take in this fact. She knew he was dying slowly; day by day he was getting weaker. She had written to Mr. Elton to ask him to postpone his visit till she wrote again. In reply she had received a characteristic, short, well expressed letter of very deep sympathy.

It was now five weeks later. Marjory's father had died, and to Marjory it were as though the sun had ceased to shine, the birds to sing, and the flowers to have lost all perfume. Poor little Marjory! the awful loneliness of her life seemed as though it would crush her. It was October, gloriously bright, and somehow she wished it would not be so fine. She had absolutely no relation in the world. The new incoming Rector would soon be wanting the dear old Rectory which since childhood had been her only home. The crushing sorrow of losing her father, coupled with giving up the man she loved, in hopes that he would love the young heiress who Marjory felt assured in her own heart loved him!

But although Marjory was in such misery of mind, her thoughts daily wore themselves out with the hopeless task, of where she should live, what would be her employment? With £300 a year she, from her humble knowledge of money, felt a wealthy woman. But work, work was what she craved for; and to-day she had risen with the thought that she would offer herself as one of the workers at the Church Army. She smiled for a moment at the thought of the neat little black bonnet and white strings, and long black cloak. She had somehow drunk sorrow to-day down to the dregs. Her great faith in God had never wavered, but to-day had been her crucifixion. She believed that Mabel had by this time, most likely, almost told Dick Elton of her love, and that her beauty had won the day. Then something told her that was an insult to the man; and she shrank still more hopelessly to wonder what would happen if they did meet. She had the fixed idea that she had stolen Mabel's lover, and nothing would induce her to accept such a position. She was standing arranging a low bowl of beautiful

roses ; a large holland apron almost covered her black frock. The bowl stood in front of her dearest earthly possessions, the pictures of her father and mother. Some young artist in the early days of her father and mother's life had asked to paint them ; eventually he had won a famous name, and now these two portraits were to her of great value in more senses than one. The room was well proportioned, and had one of those hollyhock papers with big buds, a copy from a very old design ; the curtains and coverings to the chairs were reseda green linen. Bright pieces of old brass seemed to be in the exact positions that the room needed. The long, low bookcases were all round the room, with their lattice-work windows. She was standing before a tray heaped with roses, placing each one carefully in the bowl ; without heeding it she heard the front door-bell ring. It came into her mind that perhaps it was some kind girl-friend trying to drag her out for a walk. *How* terrible it was to have to face people now, knowing her aching heart at leaving everybody and everything. She was conscious that the door

opened, and someone came in, and that the door was shut behind them. Turning round with a rose in each hand, she let them both fall.

"Mr. Elton!"

"Yes," he replied, as he held her wet little hand. "Didn't you expect me? I wrote and told you I was coming, and enclosed a letter from Mabel."

Marjory drew her hand away.

"You see our postman never comes really at proper times; he leaves *one* letter for a day before he comes up our drive; but if our post brings us two, why then we get them punctually."

"Never mind," he said, picking up her two roses and placing them on the tray. Then dropping his voice, as she went on with trembling fingers arranging the flowers, "I cannot tell you, Marjory, what I've felt for you in your father's death—and loneliness,—oh, how terribly lonely *only* you know,—yet somehow I feel I understand more than ever your need of a woman's care. I want you to leave it all, *to-day*. I want you to come and stay with

my married sister. It doesn't sound very outrageous, I hope, but she is one of those unconventional women who would do anything to help another. I should tell her simply I was bringing you, and explain your life, and nothing would give her greater pleasure."

Marjory shook her head.

"Don't say no, Marjory, please," and he held out his hand.

"No—really—why, what would she think? Please don't ask me to. And would you mind coming into the garden?" She took off her apron, folded it up, put it in a deep drawer. He had taken in her sufferings at a glance: her thin, drawn face; eyes which seemed to cry out for pity—eyes which wrung his heart to find some word to comfort them.

"You promised to show me the garden the first time we met, Marjory; and here I am, only seeing it so differently from what we thought. But it is as you said, one of the most beautiful old-world gardens I have ever seen. What it means to you having to leave it now, I understand." They were standing under a superb old oak; she stood with her

head turned away. “Marjory, may I come into your life now—now that you are all alone? Will you tell me what you wouldn’t tell me five weeks ago? *You* don’t know, I don’t want you to, but, Marjory, child”—(and the tones of his voice vibrated with the depth of his feelings; he was moved as he had never been in his life before; the highest in his nature had been touched; protection at all cost for this lonely girl, even if she would not marry him)—“don’t even tell me anything if you would rather not; just make me do what you want. It sounds like a farce, but even if you wish it I’ll never tell you I love you again, if by so doing I can protect you.”

He dropped into a big basket-chair, and clasped his hands tightly together; his face was devoid of all colour. Her averted head sank a shade lower, then with a cry of grief she fell on her knees in front of him, sobbing, sobbing as though her heart would break. He never attempted to touch her, he *dare* not. The *awful* temptation to fold her in his arms was almost overwhelming him, and, after the words he had just said to her, seemed like an insult.

"What did Mabel say in her letter, do you know?" Her voice struggled bravely to be calm.

"No; not the faintest idea," he replied slowly, shaking his head.

"Well then, I *must* speak, but please, please don't tell Mabel. Mr. Elton, I know she loves you—and I could not rob her of the man she loves."

At any other time Dick would have laughed, but now he only said gravely, "You are wrong; you are wrong, I am *convinced*. But, to admit your line of thought, would it not be kinder to let Mabel die broken-hearted" (with an amused little smile) "than all three of us? Marjory child, don't you see my point?"

She had risen to ~~her~~ feet and stood erect.

"No, I don't agree. I should feel I had acted dishonourably."

"But how?"

"By robbing her of you."

"My dear child, I *never* was hers!"

"Ah! but you could have been."

"Never, never!"

"Please, Mr. Elton," and the voice did falter,

"will you go away ; it makes it so impossible to agree with you."

He never lost his patience with her for a moment ; all he did was to regard the woman of nineteen summers as though she had had the ten years taken away, and he treated her as a sick child.

"No, Marjory, I am not going away yet. I want some tea in your house ; I've had no lunch—and it is four now. Is it *very* trying of me to ask for it ?"

With a weary shake of the head she led the way back to the house, and as she passed through the hall she ordered tea to be brought. But on the slab lay *the* letter.

"Would you like to see father's study ?"

"Yes, naturally, above everything."

It was just the room hundreds of poor clergy have, but not, alas ! decorated with such flowers ; they simply made you draw in your breath at the exquisite perfume.

"Yes, I always kept father's room like this," she said in answer to his expression of surprise. "That's why he said he learnt to write his sermons so easily."

"Read my letter, Marjory, and Mabel's, in here."

He closed the door and stood with his back against it. Marjory was by the window, her back towards him.

"DEAREST MARJORY,—My people won't give their consent to my marrying Charlie Lascelles, so I mean to run away; and by the time you get this I shall be his wife! He hasn't got any money, that is his only sin! You'll come and see us soon dear,

"MABEL."

"P.S.—I sometimes feared I made you think I cared for Dick, but it was only to make no one know about Charlie."

Marjory never moved; she stood as though turned to stone. The sorrow in her life had almost crushed her; now had come a counterblast of the most overwhelming joy. She held the top of a chair tightly, so as to give her strength to stand. Then, without a word of *real* explanation, woman-like she turned and walked up to Dick Elton. He was looking up

at an old hunting picture ; she slipped, however, in front of him.

“Dick, I am sorry. I *was* wrong.”

“And Mabel told you so?” He looked so tall, overshadowing her little black figure ; and in his face had come a light she had never seen before.

“Here is the letter.” A little, penitent, pleading hand was held out.

He read the letter, and holding it in his hand said—

“*And what do you deserve?*” The mock sternness in his voice compelled her to look up and see the amused look in his eyes.

“Everything that’s bad.”

“And although you say that, you wouldn’t *admit*, I suppose, anything but that after all you would have calmly sacrificed Marjory and Dick Elton if Mabel *had* loved me?” He was looking at her discomfort with an amused smile, and then he bit the side of his lip.

“Why make me more miserable over it? *You* even, Dick, don’t know what it cost me to *try* and be honourable.”

And then Dick was actually audacious, for he said with utter calmness—

“No; you see, little girl, you loved me too much to be able to give me up easily.” He had meant to get a sharp, teasing reply; instead she simply looked up, poor, little, weary, lined face, with eyes that shone with a strange happy light. And he, what could he do but put two strong arms round her and kiss her pretty, soft hair?

Seven years after let us lift the curtain for one moment, just to realise for ourselves how God blesses some of our earthly unions.

In a house standing in Carlton House Terrace, seated in a huge arm-chair placed beside a writing-table, in a room furnished so *solidly* with old oak, and an air of such comfort that as one entered one felt the wondrous sense of “Home.” Beautiful Japanese ivory carvings stood in a cabinet of glass. The room was not crowded, yet the deep chimney-corner and huge logs smouldering on the hearth made one long to see an

ancient dame of the past century enter, bedecked with patches and powder.

Marjory Elton sat in the huge arm-chair, poring over a long list of names. Her boy of five years stood in the chair behind her, driving with pale-blue ribbons his mother as his imaginary horse. The door opened and Dick came in, unchanged in appearance, but with an arm in a “splint”; he had broken it out hunting. His wife looked up; and the small child, Tom, said—

“Farver, mother’s my Cambridge horse.”

Dick looked at him and wondered, as he had never ceased to wonder, why God had blessed him with anything so beautiful. The boy was an imp of mischief, and his face like a young god. Light brown, short curls surrounded the most bewitching little face; rosy, healthy, and soft was the sweet little person’s exterior.

“That’s your wicked Cambridge mother, Tom; but I *knew* because it was Boat Race Day what she’d do, so I’ve tied my little Oxford daughter’s cot with my Oxford blue scarf.”

Marjory laughed.

"How mean of you, Dick! My darling father was a Cambridge man, and yet just because you rowed in a silly old boat for Oxford (and, by the way, that year it *was* beaten by Cambridge) both your children, and I included, are to be Oxford! *No*, Tom and I are Cambridge to the death. Poor little Olive, peacefully sleeping in her cot, to be decorated with *dark blue* I consider mean."

"Do you?" said Dick, with his one hand on her shoulder, and reading the names on the list as he did so.

"Are these *all* to be called on Dick?" asked Marjory, with a deep sigh. "They *all* voted for you, Mr. Etteridge says, and these are the leading people in the County. Oh, Dick, I shall get shyder and shyder at every house I call at. I know so well what we poor wretched Members' wives have to go through."

Here the nurse opened the door and asked Master Tom to come. The child in scrambling down knocked against his father's arm; not a sound escaped Dick, for he knew the sensitive little heart which lay underneath that roguish

exterior, and *how* deep would have been the sorrow for causing him pain. But Marjory felt it all, for she had risen and was standing at the fire. Just the same slight, dainty, little woman of old, but her face had in it a strength which only years can bring to women such as Marjory. The pretty, soft hair was coiled high on her little head, and as she stood with her soft eyes watching her husband one could have said “stand, stand as you are, for the fair, sweet type of the English girl, wife, and mother, and let an artist hand it down to posterity as an emblem of purity.”

Dick thought Marjory had not seen he was hurt, and he turned and walked to the window, unconscious of the lines of pain on his cheeks. His arm had been badly broken two weeks ago out hunting, and the jar little Tom had given it caused him to feel almost faint with the sickening pain. Marjory watched him, and then, as he did not speak, said very gently, “Dick, come here.”

He came; and she nodded to him to sit in the deep chair by the fire. He did so, taking out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead.

"Do you feel faint?" she asked.

"Only for a moment," he replied, trying to smile. "The jar to a broken bone is quite different from any other pain somehow."

She was silent. He dropped his face into his hand and said—

"Don't wait in for me, Marjory. Go out, and I will join you in Kensington Gardens. I must needs promise that young imp, Tom, because I hadn't got enough to do, we would sail his boat on the Round Pond on Boat Race Day."

She came to her husband's chair, and gently, very gently, over and over again, stroked the bent head. To her children her love was most demonstrative, to her husband she accepted *all* his (which to all comers was plainly evident). And perhaps the outside world would have thought she gave very little in return—but they failed to know her.

"I'm so sorry our tiny Tom hurt you." And dropping on her knees she encircled the bent head with her arms.

"Child, it doesn't matter a bit," and he raised his face and looked into her eyes. "I'm

only such a fool to show it.” He took her little hand and kissed it. “I shall be all right in a minute.”

“You see, Dick, it is no use my offering to go; tiny Tom means *you* and no one else.”

They stood together, and the colour slowly came back into his face. “Marjory, child, how blessed we are,”—the deep chimney corner sheltered them both. “I never forget one day to thank God for you. At all costs, you wilful little woman, you would have wrecked us!”

“I admit it,” she replied humbly. “But after all it did us good. We learnt what life meant without each other, Dick; at least,” with a demure little smile she added, “I did.”

No one knew better how to lower the tone of her voice than Marjory, and never had she lost the knowledge of the power her voice contained; in fact the seven years of unbroken happiness had only taught her to use her charms. She had tricks of voice which, if possible, would have got blood out of a stone, and when she brought her power of persuasion

to bear on Dick he would simply look at her ; and she knew he couldn't put it into words, but he understood, and if need be would have gone to the ends of the earth.

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR.

In *The Kingdom of Matter*, by Maeterlinck, we read—

“ When shall we find instead of the morbid, unnatural excitement produced by too copious, oppressive repasts, by stimulants that are the insidious agents of the enemy we seek to destroy—when shall we find in their place, the contained and deliberate gladness of a spirit that is for ever exalted because it for ever is seeking to understand, and to love ? ”

In the above story, “ At all Costs,” may we be permitted to hope that our hero and heroine have been allowed to find through the path they chose the same road to true happiness as Maeterlinck depicts ?

In Maeterlinck's *Buried Temple* we find—

"When shall we see the deep, great love of two beings to whom the knowledge has come that it is only when their thoughts and their feelings, and all that is more mysterious still than thoughts and feelings, have blended, and day by day become more essentially one, that the joys of the flesh are freed from the after disquiet, and leave no bitterness behind?"

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